

### rheumatic fever

a subacute febrile syndrome occurring after group A  $\beta$ -hemolytic streptococcal infection (usually pharyngitis) and mediated by an immune response to the organism; most often seen in children and young adults; features include fever, myocarditis (causing tachycardia and sometimes acute cardiac failure), endocarditis (with valvular incompetence, followed after healing by scarring), and migratory polyarthritis; less often, subcutaneous nodules, erythema marginatum, and Sydenham chorea; relapses can occur after reinfection with streptococci.

Criteria for diagnosis of acute rheumatic fever were published by Jones in 1944. Regimens for prevention of initial and recurring attacks, and guidelines for treatment, have remained essentially unchanged for decades. Although acute rheumatic fever has ceased to be a major public health problem in the U.S., the incidence is still high in developing countries. In India, for example, where medical services have failed to keep pace with urbanization and industrialization, 250,000 new cases are diagnosed in school children annually. The incidence of rheumatic fever in the U.S., which had declined steadily for several decades after antibiotic treatment of streptococcal pharyngitis (strep throat) became standard, began rising again in the late 1980s and 1990s, with some urban clusters showing a 10-fold increase in incidence. Historically, rheumatic fever is a disease of children in lower socioeconomic strata. In a number of recent clusters, most of the victims were adults, and when children have been involved, they have often belonged to middle- and upper-class families. As many as 75% of patients denied any history of recent sore throat, and some of those who had been diagnosed with preceding strep throat had been treated with antibiotics. Cardiac and articular manifestations of rheumatic fever are considered autoimmune phenomena, due to a postulated rheumatogenic factor that has never been isolated.

Pathogenicity in streptococci is known to be associated with the presence of an M protein in the cell membrane, which is also responsible for the appearance of a surface fuzz on microscopic examination of organisms, and the production of mucoid colonies on blood agar. Organisms implicated in several recent clusters of rheumatic fever have belonged to mucoid strains, particularly serotypes M 3 and M 18. Widespread antibiotic use in recent years, not all of it appropriate or justified by current medical knowledge, may have led to the resurgence of rheumatic fever by favoring the rise and spread of virulent strains of streptococcus, or by reducing the ability of certain populations to mount an immune response against them. Infectious disease authorities are currently reevaluating the diagnosis and management of streptococcal infection, particularly with respect to rapid slide tests and to drug regimens approved for use in the treatment of acute streptococcal pharyngitis and hence in the prophylaxis of rheumatic fever. See Jones criteria, under criterion.

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References > American Health ® Digital

## rheumatic fever

**NOUN:** A severe infectious disease occurring chiefly in children, characterized by fever and painful inflammation of the joints and frequently resulting in permanent damage to the valves of the heart

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**rheumatism (roo'mă-tizm)**

1. Obsolete term for rheumatic fever.
2. Indefinite term applied to various conditions with pain or other symptoms of articular origin or related to other elements of the musculoskeletal system.

[G. *rheumatismos*, rheuma, a flux]

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## poliomyelitis

SYLLABICATION: po·li·o·my·e·li·tis

PRONUNCIATION: pō'li-o-mī'e-lī'tēz

NOUN: A highly infectious viral disease that chiefly affects children and, in its acute forms, causes inflammation of motor neurons of the spinal cord and brainstem, leading to paralysis, muscular atrophy, and often deformity. Through vaccination, the disease is preventable. Also called *infantile paralysis*.

ETYMOLOGY: New Latin : Greek *polios*, gray; see *pel-*<sup>1</sup> in Appendix I + *myelitis*.

OTHER FORMS: **po'li-o-my'e-lit'ic** (-līt'ik) —ADJECTIVE

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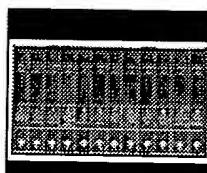
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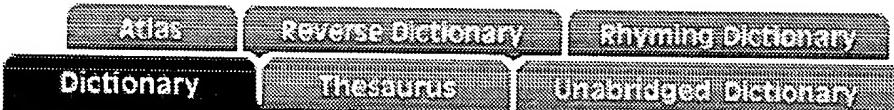
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Date: circa 1753

: an inflammatory condition of the skin characterized by redness, itching, and oozing vesicular lesions which become scaly, crusted, or hardened

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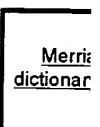
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